The Extent of Blue Ocean Leadership, Employee Engagement and Team Performance During Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to identify the extent of blue ocean leadership, employee engagement, and team performance among lecturers in vocational college during COVID-19 pandemic. Cross-sectional research design has been implemented, while quantitative data was collected from 2580 lecturers from the population across the 22 vocational colleges located in North Zone of Malaysia, using a structured survey. For analysis, descriptive analysis was employed using SPSS software version 23. The findings of the study revealed that there is a high level of blue ocean leadership, employee engagement, and team performance among lecturers in vocational college during COVID-19 pandemic. Future researchers could further broaden the study by cross-examining across the different vocational colleges' state in Malaysia.

Keywords: COVID-19, Blue Ocean Leadership, Employee Engagement, Team Performance, Lecturers, Vocational College

Introduction

The pandemic of COVID-19 and its lockdown has taken the world by storm. It is not just a health problem, but it is a full-blown economic and social crisis that threatens billions of people's lives and livelihoods (Clark & Gruending, 2020). Therefore, COVID-19 has drawn considerable attention universally. For an organization, significant disruption will endanger business continuity (Dwiedienawati, Tjahjana, Faisal, Gandasari, & Abdinagoro, 2020).

Whereas this pandemic outbreak had disrupted not only the political, social, economics sector but also the education sector as well. As Covid-19 cases expanded quickly in Malaysia, the Movement Control Order (MCO) was forced cross country by the government, hence vocational colleges were immediately closed down. Subsequently,

teaching and learning were converted directly into the distance and remote formats (Mohamad Nasri, Husnin, Mahmud, & Halim, 2020). Besides, lecturers are involving in many engagement activities like virtual learning and development, webinars with industry experts, team meet-ups virtually, live sessions for new-skill training, recognition and acknowledgement session, providing online guidance for exercise, and many more online teaching and learning sessions (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020).

Strong workload among lecturers at vocational colleges leading extremely high pressure (Pellerone, Rapisarda, Trischitta, Vitale & Ramaci, 2020) and low organisational commitment among lecturers (Barkhuizen, Rothman & Van de Viljver, 2014; Shafiq & Rana, 2016), and causing high turnover rate (Mack, Johnson, Jones-Rincon, Tsatenawa & Howard, 2019). As this pandemic of COVID-19 will worst the employee engagement problem, which the previous study shows that 13 per cent of global employees are involved (Gallup, 2013) and reflect a low level of employee engagement (Nienaber, 2019).

On the other hand, there is a more astounding issue of employee engagement in Malaysia, where 8 per cent of the study shows no direct involvement, 11 per cent with engagement compared to a high 81% with less involvement. Along with the lower rate of employee engagement, however, there is increasing concern over the degree of employee engagement among lecturer in vocational colleges. Yet, employee engagement is a crucial topic to be discussed in the public sector.

Meanwhile, this alarming rate of employee engagement has resulted in a decline in team performance among lecturers as well as harming the quality of education (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2012). In a work environment full of dynamic work challenges, this stress triggers emotional disturbances, threatening personal well-being and individual performance as well as team performance in the organization. Therefore, there is a needs to figure out the level of team performance in the context of vocational college. But, this issue has not treated in detail by the researcher.

In order to ensure the smooth operation of the organization, the ability of management to implement employee engagement strategies is important in an organization (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017), especially in a competitive environment. In a competitive environment, organizational leaders need to adapt, be more flexible and always be prepared for ever-changing environments. Thus, leaders need to practice leadership that is appropriate to the implementation of change, especially in the education system (Siva, Khuan, & Khoo, 2015). In terms of employees, for example, lecturers are recommended to be active, aggressive and involved as well as working in groups as well as marginalized individually to face situations of uncertainty (Chen, 2017; Gallup, 2017; Paulsen, 2017).

Thus, leaders play an important role in struggling for management to keep current staff involved in their jobs (Lee et al., 2016). Leaders are continually evolving new, imaginative and efficient ways to involve workers healthily during this difficult period. It is uncontested that successful leadership is essential during global emergencies (Rubenstein, Bergin, & Rowe, 2020). Blue ocean leadership (BOL) claimed was capable of improving leadership strategies so that all employees are interested in furthering their company forward using their talents and energy (Jian, Yin, & Awang, 2020a; Oh, Khoo & Awang, 2020). While BOL has been evaluated and clarified to some degree in previous studies (Kim & Mauborgne, 2014; Zehra, 2015; Wan Hanafi, Daud & Baharin, 2016; Zakaria, Idris & Ismail, 2017; Wan Hanafi & Daud, 2019), however, the extent of blue ocean leadership in vocational college have not treated by researchers in much detail. Hence, the objective of this study is to identify the extent of blue ocean leadership, employee engagement, and team performance among lecturers in

vocational college during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review
COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 starts to propagate at the end of December 2019 and it began in Wuhan, China (Zu et al. 2020). Since the beginning of January 2020, the entire world started to recognise the new virus COVID-19. In January, the world becomes turbulent. There is a rapid rise in the number of positive patients and there are no boundaries to shield humans from this virus. In February, China decides to lockdown Wuhan to control the dissemination of the virus (Qianying et al, 2020). Within a short period, COVID-19 stretch promptly and shook other countries worldwide. As the virus prolonged to spread, many sectors as financial, business, tourism, and education have been influenced by the government in different countries during the implemented MCO and lockdown (Kavaljit, 2020).

Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL)

Initially, Kim and Mauborgne (2014) have described BOL as a new model of leadership. By modifying the leadership profile of the company, this leadership style is capable to transform disengaged workers to become employees of a company. BOL stresses the triumph of a company that improves leadership power quickly and at a lower monetary cost, which could be turned into increased efficiency for the organization service (Kim & Mauborgne, 2014; Loh, Yusof, & Lau, 2018). Loh and his friends stressed that BOL concentrates on the actions and activities of leaders that can be modified with less effort and time. Meanwhile, BOL could strengthen strategic decision-making (Wan Hanafi & Daud, 2019). From the point of view of BOL, every leader has a client. The customer refers to the individual in the management of the organization, either 'buy' or "don't buy' the service (leadership).

Employee Engagement (EE)

Kahn (1990) perceived EE as the stage of devotion and involvement of employees in their organisation in terms of their physical, cognitive and emotional positions, in order to express their roles. In the meantime, Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) agree with Kahn and further expand on EE as the participation and gratification of an individual with a working spirit. However, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2007) has taken a different view and stated EE as an amalgamation of the responsibility to the organisation and the importance of being able to support its colleagues. Presently, EE claimed by researchers whereby employee had a genuine and wide-ranging relationship with companies that culminated in a willingness to act unexpectedly to help the organisation achieve success (Gebauer & Lowman, 2009) and also confirmed as goals and work targeted at others through personal initiative, suitability, craftsmanship and persistence towards the objectives of the organisation (Macey, Schneider, Barbara, Young & Schneider, 2009). While Kinicki and Fugate (2016) stated EE as the removal of an organisation, they have given themselves roles of function, dedication, individuals and express themselves physically, intellectually and emotionally through the performance of their roles. It can therefore be inferred that EE is the most important factor in achieving a specific vision and mission and has a major influence on organisations, institutions and businesses (Jian, Yin & Awang, 2020b). It is also a practice that saturates the prospects of company achievement, subsidising the

organisational and individual performance, productivity and well-being of employees (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020).

Team Performance (TF)

TF was intellectualized as an indicator of output and effectiveness and creativity success metrics have been used (Van Woerkom & Croon, 2009). Whereas previous researchers (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp & Gilson, 2008; Morgeson, Lindoerfer, & Loring, 2010) saw TF as behaviour in the achievement of set team goals and is considered a fundamental dimension of team effectiveness. Since then, teamwork is formed to perform tasks and produces output that at least meets the needs (Hackman, 1987). Zhang, Waldman and Wang (2012) agree with this definition and continue perceived TF as the extent to which a team achieves a goal or mission which assisted by some informal leaders. Meanwhile, informal leaders also share more information and knowledge within the team (Daniel & Kahn, 1978), thereby increasing information sharing among team members thus improving TF (Ajay, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006). Next, TF displays a larger amount of contributions consistently compared to total contributions from individuals (Macht, Nembhard, Kim, & Rothrock, 2014). At the same time, TF defined as a gradual process in which team members engage in a teamwork process to manage tasks either individually or as a team (Salas, Cooke & Rosen, 2008; Costa, Passos, Bakker, Romana, & Ferrao, 2017). Subsequently, TF concluded as the result of a team process that has a subjective evaluation of team members (Han, Lee, Beyerlein, & Kolb, 2017). Therefore, when team members work together, overall team performance improves (Martin, Cormican, Sampaio, & Wu, 2018). Hence, a team member should work hard based on synergy goals by using positive synergy and complementary skills (Robbins & Coulter, 2012).

Methods
Research Instrument

This study employed a survey method to collect data for this study. Using this data collection procedure will assist the researcher to congregate truthful data, reduce bias, and rise the quality of data being collected (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010; Cresswell, 2015). This study was conducted at 22 vocational colleges located in the North Zone of Malaysia, which is Penang, Kedah, Perlis, and Perak. A survey questionnaire was modified based on the previous literature review.

Sample

This study employed stratified random sampling to gather 401 survey questionnaires from lecturers who work at vocational college. This sampling technique was applied because it is less biased sampling procedures in the process of selecting a sample and generate representative research findings. Researchers used a random number table when selecting the sample. The survey questionnaires were answered by respondents based on their agreement and voluntary basis.

Instrument

The instrument being used in this research is a list of questionnaires containing 37 questions relating to the study that was distributed to respondents to gather the necessary response in this study. The questionnaires consisted of four parts (A, B, C, and D). Part A consists of 8 questions on demographic information while part B consists of 12 questions on blue ocean leadership which adapted by Kim & Mauborgne (2014) & Zehra (2015). Part C consists of 11

questions on employee engagement which adapted by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002). In part D, the study employed 6 questions on team performance which adapted by Callea, Urbini, Benevene, Cortini, Di Lemma & West (2014). This set of questionnaires carried the score made regarding five Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Pilot Study

A pilot study is conducted to test the reliability of the structured instrument and ensure the instrument is fit to the situation and understood by the respondents. According to Mail and Noordin (2015), reliability refers to the ability of certain indicators or variables to have relied consistently on upon. The concept of the validity of a study is closely related to the concept of measurement. Based on Sekaran and Bougie (2010), the value for the reliability coefficient is near to 1, it considered as high-reliability value, whereas the value of the coefficient is 0.6 will treated as low-reliability value, while 0.7 can be accepted, and 0.8 will be measured as good. To ensure the reliability of the structured instrument to meet the standard, researchers conducted a pilot study on 300 lecturers. The result from the analysis showed that the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient is high at 0.929. Therefore, the researchers found that the adopted questionnaire is appropriate to implement in the actual study.

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 23.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Science). Descriptive analysis has been used to measure the mean to examine the extent of BOL, EE, and TF among lecturers in vocational colleges.

Findings and Discussion
Findings

A total of 401 lecturers have answered the questionnaires. the analysis of the results has shown in the table as follows.

Table 1
Respondent's demographic

Demographic	Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less than 28 years old	43	10.7
	28 - 38 years old	189	47.1
	More than 38 years old	169	42.2
Races	Malay	360	89.8
	Chinese	24	6.0
	Indian	13	3.2
	Others	4	1.0
Sex	Male	156	38.9
	Female	245	61.1
Teaching Area	Science & Mathematic	81	20.2
	Language	86	21.4
	Humanity	64	16.0
	Vocational & Technology	170	42.4
Academic profile	Bachelor	360	89.8
	Master	40	10.0
	Phd	1	0.2

Teaching experiences	10 years and below	153	38.2
	11-20 years	136	33.9
	21 years and above	112	27.9
Marital status	Single	62	15.5
	Married	339	84.5
Monthly income	Less than RM4,000	109	27.2
	RM4,000 – RM8,000	242	60.3
	RM8,001 and above	50	12.5
	Total	401	100.0

Table 2

The result of the extent of blue ocean leadership among lecturers in the vocational college

	Item	Mean score
1	I trained my subordinates to succeed.	3.93
2	I motivate the subordinates to succeed.	4.04
3	I clearly explain the strategy to the subordinates.	4.00
4	I develop subordinate skills to accomplish a task.	4.03
5	I convey the vision and mission of the college/ department to the subordinates.	4.01
6	I allow subordinates to do a project/ job.	4.10
7	I constantly monitor poor subordinate work performance.	3.91
8	I developed a plan for college / departmental change.	3.84
9	I analyze future trends and their implications for colleges/ departments.	3.86
10	I set performance goals along with subordinates.	3.97
11	Providing subordinates with the motivation to increase their confidence is important and necessary.	4.14
12	I share the best practices in the team.	4.14
13	I think leaders should lead but not rule.	4.35
14	I explore and highlight existing talent in subordinates.	4.06

"1" = Strongly disagree, "2" = Disagree, "3" = Neutral, "4" = Agree, "5" = Strongly agree

The empirical test shows that the lowest mean was for the question "I developed a plan for college / departmental change." (mean = 3.00), this indicates that the lecturers moderately developed a plan whenever there exists a change in his/her college or department. On the other hand, the question with the highest mean, which is (4.35), and the question is "I think leaders should lead but not rule." (Table 2).

Table 3
The result of the extent of employee engagement among lecturers in the vocational college

	Item	Mean score
1	I am proud of the work that I do	4.19
2	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose	4.17
3	Time flies when I am working	4.13
4	I am enthusiastic about my job	4.10
5	At my work, I always persevere, even when things do not go well	4.12
6	To me, my job is challenging	4.02
7	I get carried away when I am working	4.15
8	I can continue working for very long periods at a time	3.78
9	At my job, I am very resilient, mentally	4.04
10	When I am working, I forget everything else around me	3.64
11	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	4.08
12	At my work, I feel bursting with energy	4.08
13	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	4.09

"1" = Strongly disagree, "2" = Disagree, "3" = Neutral, "4" = Agree, "5" = Strongly agree

The empirical test shows that the lowest mean was for the question "When I am working, I forget everything else around me." (mean = 3.64), this designates that the lecturers are thinking of something else when they are working. Conversely, the questions with the highest mean, which is (4.19), is "I am proud of the work that I do" (Table 3).

Table 4
The result of the level of team performance among lecturers in the vocational college

	Item	Mean score
1	I want to continue working on this team.	4.07
2	I am satisfied with the number of responsibilities and tasks assigned to the team.	3.97
3	In my team, we are developing new and improved ways of working.	4.01
4	My team works closely with team members and members from other departments in the college.	4.03
5	Head of Department / Head of Program always praises the quality of work of our team.	3.99
6	Teamwork cannot be accomplished without the contribution of each team member.	4.28
7	My team understands any changes in college/department policy and the reasons behind the change.	3.95
8	In my team, we look for and support alternatives to new products or services.	4.02

"1" = Strongly disagree, "2" = Disagree, "3" = Neutral, "4" = Agree, "5" = Strongly agree

The empirical test displays that the lowest mean was for the question "My team understands any changes in college/department policy and the reasons behind the change." (mean = 3.95), this describes that the lecturers are disagreed about his/her team to realize the reason behind the change in their college/department. On the contrary, the questions with the highest mean, which is (4.28), are "Teamwork cannot be accomplished without the contribution of each team member." (Table 4).

Conclusion

Overall, this study attempt to discover the extent of BOL, EE, and TF among lecturers in vocational college during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings show that the BOL, EE, and TF are high among the lecturers in vocational colleges. The findings can be a reference and help the organization's leader reflect on themselves, especially their leadership and practices, to enhance EE and TF among the lecturers in vocational colleges, especially in this sudden pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted education sector in Malaysia. In the future, researchers may extend the study by cross-examining across the different vocational colleges' state in Malaysia.

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